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Changing Attitudes Toward Devotion and Duty in Western Literature

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The objective of this study was to examine the literary tradition of courtly love and a number of its twentieth-century reinterpretations to see how it has changed in response to modern problems. The study also included an investigation as to how courtly love has affected different writers, and why certain writers have turned to the tradition in times of distress. A final discussion is provided on what we can expect from changing

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Changing Attitudes Toward Devotion and Duty in Western Literature

A Trident Scholar Project Report
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Introduction

While the exact origins of courtly love are unknown, there can be no argument as to the effect it has had on Western society. The rules of courtship, as they have come to be known, have been perpetuated by almost every form of popular culture, from the cinema to television to radio. It is indeed difficult to imagine a film that is not about love, or does not have some sort of love story included. My study, as it began, was an inquiry into the reasons for this fascination, and a discussion of the influence of courtly love. My intention was to compare this seemingly outdated system of courtship with what was my impression of today's more widely accepted notion of sexual equality by analyzing the origins of the tradition of courtly love and then examining a number of its twentieth century reinterpretations. My hypothesis was that many contemporary writers have turned to the courtly love tradition as a source for some stability in times of perceived societal crisis. Finally, I wanted to discuss what a military system

such as that at the U. S. Naval Academy, which is based on many of the chivalric traditions could expect from a society that seems to be discarding the old notion of the "damsel in distress" for the possibility of women returning from combat in body bags.

First - the original sources. During the twelfth century, in the southern part of France, a group of people began to write about love. Specifically, the troubadours began to sing about various characters and their adventures with love. The troubadours were traveling minstrels of a sort who went from court to court entertaining the aristocracy of Southern France. Many of them became rather well known for their skills, and one who became particularly famous was Guilhem IX of Aquitaine.

Guilhem is among the most famous because his work is the oldest medieval love poetry to survive to the present day; because these poems are the oldest extant, many critics consider Guilhem to be the first of the troubadours. He lived, according to most sources, from 1071 to 1127. Of his work, only eleven poems survive, including five "love" poems. The love poems were written with a central theme of love in three forms: a physical, or "shared" love; Amors or courteous love; and Jois, a supreme form of spiritual love. Perhaps the most important concept that I discovered in

these poems and in the criticism is the idea of the conflict between the individual's desire for self-fulfillment and the adherence to the courtly societal values. Even in its earliest forms, the conflict between a person's duty to self and to society is readily apparent. There is a constant struggle that exists between the lover's or the knight's desire to consummate his love for his lady, and his devotion to the Christian ideals of chastity and purity.

These early ideals were later codified by a man known as Andreas Capellanus, or Andre the Chaplain, sometime between 1174 and 1186. The first part of Andreas's The Art of Courtly Love is an introduction to love, in which the author explains what love is and exactly whom it may affect. He maintains that "love is a certain inborn suffering derived from the sight of and excessive meditation upon the beauty of the opposite sex." The two most pronounced characteristics of lovers are fear and suffering, which C.S. Lewis interprets almost 800 years later as the beginning of a "love religion" based on a reaction to Christianity.

A large part of Andreas's work is a description of the way courtly relationships are supposed to be conducted as portrayed through a number of dialogues between men and women on different social levels. A man who is of the low nobility, for example, is required to speak a certain way to

the woman of the high or highest nobility. Some of the characteristics of the noble courtly lover include generosity, truthfulness, courage, wisdom, and devotion. All of these traits would be considered worthwhile today, and they were written in the twelfth century. Among the most interesting sections of this work are the 31 "rules of love" which include the rules that were supposedly used in the courts of love.

The second part of my study focused on the 20th century. C.S. Lewis, renowned for The Chronicles of Narnia and Screwtape Letters, also wrote The Allegory of Love as a graduate student. Published in 1936, this book was a discussion of allegory as a literary phenomenon from "its birth and growth to what it is in Spenser." Courtly love is an unavoidable topic, according to Lewis, because it directly involves the conflict between passionate love, and a higher Christian love. Among the most influential Christian writers in modern Western society, Lewis experienced a "revelation" as it is described in Surprised by Joy, in 1929, and from that point forward, his work must be considered in a religious context. While it does not directly approach the topic of religion, The Allegory of Love has an underlying theme that the passion described by the courtly lovers was a result of a reaction to the church

at the time. The "religion of love" as Lewis describes it, was in a certain way a parody of the relationship of men to God. The ennobling passion that one felt could place one in a "higher realm" much in the same way Christian love could bring one to a closer understanding of God. The bottom line is that passion began to replace true love at the hands of the authors of this tradition. Lewis's analysis is in a large part a reaction to his particular situation. He is, at this time, living in the modernist era, in which many writers and artists had discarded the conventions of the nineteenth century. The complex theologies of existentialism and neo-orthodoxy that surfaced in the early part of the twentieth century disturbed Lewis, and his reaction was to search for a tradition that might counter them.

Another twentieth century writer who examines the courtly love tradition is Denis De Rougemont, a French author who wrote Love in the Western World in 1940. De Rougemont discusses the subject from the standpoint that many of our ideas about love are merely part of a courtly "myth" that has been perpetuated by Western society. His work is a reaction to a social situation in which he sees the breakdown of marriage as the first step toward the eventual destruction of society as we know it. Passion is

invariably linked with death in many of these myths, and de Rougemont is convinced that the modern cinema and other forms of popular culture have, in effect, brainwashed youth to believe in this passion which will devastate them. The reason for this destruction is that the passion becomes an end in and of itself, a passion directed at passion, all-consuming and devastating in its final form. De Rougemont's work is largely a reaction to the complex psychoanalytic society that has emerged in his lifetime. He specifically singles out Freudian analysis, which he dismisses as being entirely too complex and overthought. In a way, de Rougemont is much like Lewis in that he is reacting conservatively to what he sees as a chaotic and deteriorating social fabric; unlike Lewis, he points to courtly love as the source of the problem rather than a possible solution. He acknowledges a higher form of love, as Lewis does, and says that we have displaced our ability to love with this passion for passion. The modern notion that everything is driven by a sexual desire does not appeal to de Rougemont. We have brought this myth into existence and can easily discard it.

Finally, I read a contemporary fictional work by Marion Zimmer Bradley, entitled The Mists of Avalon. Although various theories exist about whether or not a work should be

considered feminist just by the virtue of the fact that it was written by a woman, this work should be considered in a feminist light. Her version of the Arthurian legend is unlike any that have come before it because it is written from the perspective of the women in the story. Morgan le Fay, or Morgaine, is a central character, as are Gwenhwyfar and Igraine. Perhaps the most important aspect of this work is that it points out the religious shift from Druidism to Christianity as the main source of women's loss of public and political power. Morgaine and Igraine are portrayed as practitioners in a once-powerful religion, Druidism. Gwenhwyfar is raised a Christian, is portrayed as weak and subservient to her husband the king and her lover Lancelot. Overall, it becomes apparent that Bradley is portraying modern Christian society as subjugating women to a secondary role. Perhaps it should be noted that many feminists have interpreted the courtly love and courtly society as having been created to appease women for their lack of power in society. Men created a system in which the women were supposedly in control, when in fact they were not, and could never have the reins of power.

From a military standpoint, it is easy to see how this tradition could affect our ideas of women in the military. The passion myth, or courtly love tradition, has held us

bound to rules that dictate men and women's roles in society. However, with women's roles increasing in the military almost daily, we should probably reassess how much we should depend on these role models now and in the future.

The Origins of Courtly Love

The Troubadours

> Every one has heard of courtly love, and every one knows that it appears quite suddenly at the end of the eleventh century in Languedoc.[1]

Whether one agrees with this statement or not, it is certainly true that the troubadours were among the first to compose verse with love as its central theme. The troubadours came on the scene in southern France in the late 1100's. According to L.T. Topsfield in his introduction to Troubadours and Love, during the period between 1150 and 1180, "there appears to be a widespread strengthening of courtly doctrine in the South of France."[2] Later, the center of this type of song-writing moved south, "from

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[1] C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition (1936; New York: Galaxy, 1958), 2.

[2]Topsfield, L. T., Troubadours and Love (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975), 2.

Poitiers to Toulouse and Carcassonne."[3] The movement came to an end, however, with the Albigensian Crusades in the thirteenth century, when much of the courtly society was destroyed and "love for the courtly lady [was] transformed into love for the Virgin."[4]

In order to understand the origins of courtly love, we must look at these entertainers and the songs they wrote. A good place to start would be with the troubadours themselves. Who or what were they exactly, and what were they doing in the south of France singing about love, anyway? Topsfield offers the following explanation:

> The word trobador comes from trobar, the Provencal equivalent of invenire, which in classical Latin rhetoric meant 'to discover, invent or devise'. The troubadour, who might be of noble, bourgeois or peasant birth, was responsible for inventing the words, the scheme of versification, and the melody for his song.[5]

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[3]Lewis, 2.

[4]Lewis, 3.

[5]Topsfield, 4.

In other words, the troubadour was more than just a minstrel. He was responsible for creating the works which he would perform in the court, and for their subject matter.

While they were concentrated in the South of France, the troubadours were also known to travel the rest of Europe, including Italy, Spain, Germany, and Hungary [6]. They were responsible for entertaining the courts by providing songs that could be compared to those of a contemporary lyricist today, whose purpose is "principally to stimulate the emotions of an audience of young people" for whom he or she is writing.[7] In the troubadour's case, he would be composing for knights in love, and therefore the troubadour would need to write "in the character of a knight" or as a knight in love.[8]

The poetry itself follows certain patterns. Most of it falls into two categories, the chanson and the sirventes.[9] While the forms of these two categories were essentially the same, the subject matter was different. The sirventes were

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[6]Topsfield, 5.

[7] Maurice Valency, In Praise of Love: An Introduction to the Love-Poetry of the Renaissance (1958; New York: Macmillan, 1961), 112.

[8]Valency, 112.

[9]Valency, 105.

poems "of blame and praise and deeds of war".[10] The chansons were songs "of war, pious songs, and pedagogical songs; but the normal theme of the troubadour chanson, endlessly varied and elaborated, was love."[11] Also known as the canso, the term chanson was basically applied to any form of love song.

Guilhem IX of Aquitaine

The most famous of these troubadours was Guilhem IX of Aquitaine, who lived from 1071 to 1127.[12] His poetry is the earliest that has survived, but it is apparent that he was not the first to write in this style. Valency suggests that his work reflects a well established tradition, one of which Guilhem himself was aware:

> I want people to know whether this poem
> that I have brought out of my work room
> is finely coloured; for in this craft I
> wear the laurels, and this is the truth,

[10]Topsfield, 4.

[11]Valency, 106.

[12]Topsfield, 11.

and I can cite this poem, when it has
been bound up, as evidence of this.[13]

His work presents, even in its earliest form, the standard for the troubadour lyrics that follow.

Guilhem wrote eleven poems that have survived, including five burlesque, and five love songs. In the last, written "under the fear of death, possibly in 1111 or 1112, . . . he describes his personal faith in the life hereafter and his joy" in his life on earth.[14] The burlesque poems, as they are known, tend to mix the serious theme of sen, sense, and foudatz, or folly. The love poems are about love on three levels: a physical, or shared love, Amors, or courteous love, and Jois, a supreme form of spiritual love.

The love lyrics show a conflict between Jois and Amors that stems from an individual's desire for self-fulfillment and the need to adhere to courtly, societal values.[15] This conflict is important in the development of the courtly love tradition as it reflects the continuing struggle between a lover's or a knight's desire to consummate his love and his devotion to Christian principles of purity and chastity.

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[13]The translations of the poems have been taken from Topsfield.

[14]Topsfield, 40.

[15]Topsfield, 39.

Guilhem was aware of the need for a person to pursue an individual happiness, represented by Jois, through a devotion to a woman in a courtly fashion. Once the lover could look past the physical part of love, he could begin to devote himself to a higher form. There was apparently in place at this time a "courtly society and doctrine of courtly love" as evidenced by the language and the behavior Guilhem describes in his work:

> If my lady will give me her love, I am ready to accept it and show my gratitude by concealing it and wooing with fair words, seeking to please her in words and deeds, cherishing all those things which uphold her reputation and furthering her praise. [16]

Guilhem's contribution to the courtly love tradition comes from the language and style of his work. He is aware of the underlying conflicts of courtly love, and portrays them in his burlesque poetry by balancing sens and foudatz. His love poetry presents the beginnings of what would become standard in the tradition. The essential elements of the

[16]Topsfield, 38.

earliest poems include a lover who is devoted to a lady, who is at the same time unsure of his worthiness and must prove it to her; an extra-marital affair cloaked in secrecy; and the storyteller himself. In addition, the troubadours created three new aspects of human love: that it is ennobling, that the beloved is raised to a position above the lover, and that love is an "ever-satisfied, ever-increasing desire."[17]

Andreas Capellanus

> For those who earnestly believed official doctrine, the love affair of the soldier and his lady was a dizzying game, a tightrope walk over the chasm of eternal torment, as exciting as the joust. Managing it properly became a matter of ritual, religion (at least in poetry, and probably to some extent in real life) - the so-called love religion or

[17]Bernard O'Donoghue, The Courtly Love Tradition (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1982), 11.

courtly love in all its innumerable varieties and forms.[18]

While the troubadours sang about love and its praises, there seems to have been no definitive source on the exact rules of love until Andreas Capellanus wrote De Arte Honeste Amandi "some time between 1174 and 1186."[19] In it Andreas describes the way in which men and women are supposed to conduct themselves in a courtly relationship. The book is divided into three sections. The first section, called an "Introduction to the Treatise on Love," deals with how to acquire love. The second is called "How Love may be Retained" and the third is "The Rejection of Love." The behavior expected of noble lovers is defined in the first two books while the third can be read as a dismissal of the sections that come before it.

The first part of Book I contains a brief introduction, and a few chapters that explain the basic characteristics of love and those whom it can affect. Andreas describes love

[18]John Gardner, The Life and Times of Chaucer (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 112.

[19]Frederick W. Locke, ed., Andreas Capellanus: The Art of Courtly Love, trans. John Jay Parry (1957; New York: Frederick Ungar, 1978), vii.

as having many physical symptoms, the most pronounced of which is fear:

> If he is a poor man, he also fears that the woman may scorn his poverty; if he is ugly, he fears that she may despise his lack of beauty or may give her love to a more handsome man; if he is rich, he fears that his parsimony in the past may stand in his way. To tell the truth, no one can number the fears of one single lover.[20]

Another important characteristic of love, according to Andreas, is that it "is a certain inborn suffering derived from the sight of and excessive meditation upon the beauty of the opposite sex." It is interesting that in this section desire is almost entirely based on physical attraction, which would seem contrary to the idea that this love was ennobling. The foundation for this type of love can only lead to physical consummation, which is a sin against the church. The conflict between courtly love and religion is not easily resolved. Indeed, it is further

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[20]Locke, 2.

complicated by the fact that a courtly relationship is, in most cases, an extramarital affair.

Andreas goes on to describe the "Effect of Love," extolling love as an uplifting virtue:

> O what a wonderful thing is love, which makes a man shine with so many virtues and teaches everyone, no matter who he is, so many good traits of character.[21]

Another effect of love is that it "adorns a man with the virtue of chastity." A man who is truly in love with a woman would never think to approach or "embrace" another. Those whom Andreas considers incapable of falling in love are the blind, the aged, and those who are "prevented by excess of passion."[22] He explains that a man who is too passionate can never be held to one woman and cannot be chaste, which makes him like a "shameless dog" in his lust.

The rest of Book I is organized as eight dialogues, each representing the proper way for men and women of varying social strata to interact. Beginning with a pair of middle-class lovers, Andreas progresses through combinations

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[21]Locke, 4.

[22]Locke, 5.

of "nobility" and "higher nobility," showing how a man might be able to gain the love of a lady. It is interesting to note, however, that while there are four levels of social status for men, there are only three for women. The women are grouped into the middle class, the simple nobility, and the higher nobility. The men, in addition to these three, have "the very highest nobility."[23] By the time Andreas reaches the third dialogue, he has established a definite scheme of courtly behavior. This dialogue portrays a woman of the higher nobility being pursued by a man of the middle class. Indeed, this arrangement might be considered the most difficult to imagine since a man of lower class has a great deal to overcome in winning the love of a noblewoman. Andreas writes:

> It would seem a very great shame and a cause of reproach for a noblewoman to pass over the upper and the intermediate ranks and take a lover from the lower class unless good character in overwhelming quantity makes up for the lack of nobility. . . .[I]t seems very much out of place if a countess or a

[23]Locke, 6.

> marchioness or any woman of the same or a higher rank gives her love to a man of the middle class, and even the lower classes look upon it as a lowering and a demeaning of herself.[24]

If he hopes to succeed in his aspirations, a man of the middle class has to be all the more versed in the ways of courtly behavior, and this dialogue offers Andreas the chance to provide his readers with many of the characteristics of the ideal courtly lover. The woman, at the request of the man, is explaining these characteristics so that she will not be insulted by being pursued by a man of the middle class.

The woman composes a list of virtues for her courtier, beginning with generosity. She says, "a man who would be considered worthy to serve in Love's army must not be in the least avaricious."[25] She explains that a man who wishes to "remain in the threshold of courtesy" must be truthful at all times, being careful not to "speak evil" and to "not utter falsehood in praise of the wicked." Many of the

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[24]Locke, 11.

[25]Locke, 13.

ideas she describes are familiar to us; they make up our current idea of an upright person. If it is to be taken seriously, this work is one of the first to codify those principles that a person might follow to be considered "good." She continues,

> He ought to be courageous in battle and hardy against his enemies, wise, cautious, and clever.
>
> He should not be a lover of several women at the same time, but for the sake of one he should be a devoted servant of all.
>
> He should. . . take care not to talk too much or to keep silent too much. He should not be too quick and sudden about making promises.[26]

All of these qualities would be considered important and virtuous qualities even today. It is interesting, though, that while Andreas was a man, he wrote this dialogue from the woman's perspective. Perhaps he was considering that women expected men to be "devoted servants" and wrote this

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[26]Locke, 14.

section to make fun of their ideals. More importantly, his obviously male basis for formulating his "ideal woman's" perspective is at work. It is a male notion that all women desire men to be at their service, an attitude that might be discussed at some length.

In the seventh dialogue, the man is of the higher nobility, and the woman is of the simple nobility. Not having to impress the woman as much, the man should be careful not to "boast very much of the fact that he is noble."[27] An important statement in this dialogue is made by the man:

> I admit it is true that your husband is a very worthy man and that he is more blest than any man in the world because he has been worthy to have the joy of embracing Your Highness. But I am greatly surprised that you wish to misapply the term 'love' to that marital affection which husband and wife are expected to feel for each other after marriage, since everybody knows that love can have no place between husband

[27]Locke, 15.

> and wife. . . .For what is love but an inordinate desire to receive passionately a furtive and hidden embrace? [28]

This dialogue would have to seem almost satirical, considering Andreas' background as a priest. By discussing marriage this way, he seems to be making fun of the notions of courtly love and all of the rituals that go along with it. A priest would likely hold the sacred bonds of matrimony in high stead rather than say love cannot exist between husband and wife. There are, however, various interpretations of Andreas' comments on marriage and the nature of love that I explained earlier and will address later.

In Book II, Andreas presents thirty one "Rules of Love" that the "King of Love himself, with his own mouth, pronounced for lovers."[29] These rules include all of the laws by which the "courts of love" decided cases brought before them. In Chapter VII of Book II, Andreas recounts some of the various decisions made by the Countess of

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[28]Locke, 17.

[29]Locke, 41.

Champagne, and other members of the court. A few of the decisions continue to focus on the fact that love cannot exist between husband and wife. Indeed, the nature of the "affection" between husband and wife was reported to have an entirely different source from that of true lovers.[30]

In the next chapter, Andreas tells a story about how the Rules of Love were acquired by a certain Briton in the "royal forest, going to see Arthur."[31] The adventure is standard for the courtly love tradition. A knight, on his way through a forest, meets a young lady of "marvelous beauty" who helps him on his quest for the love of another. She explains to him what steps he will have to take in order to succeed in his quest. He is in search of a hawk, which is "on a golden perch in Arthur's court." Of course, the young lady explains the tasks before him:

> You can't get this hawk that you are seeking unless you prove, by a combat in Arthur's palace, that you enjoy the love of a more beautiful lady than any man at Arthur's court has; you can't even enter the palace until you show the guards the

[30]Locke, 33.

[31]Locke, 35.

> hawk's gauntlet, and you can't get this gauntlet except by overcoming two mighty knights in a double combat. [32]

By the end of this adventure, the knight has faced all of these perils and has gained possession of the hawk. Attached to the hawk's perch is a parchment with the rules of love written on it, which the knight is obliged to take back with him and "make known to lovers."[33] These were the rules used in the courts of love:

I. Marriage is no real excuse for not loving.
II. He who is not jealous cannot love.
III. No one can be bound by a double love.
IV. It is well known that love is always increasing or decreasing.
V. That which a lover takes against his will of his lover has no relish.
VI. Boys do not love until they arrive at the age of maturity.
VII. When one lover dies, a widowhood of two years is required by the survivor.

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[32]Locke, 35.

[33]Locke, 41.

VIII. No one should be deprived of love without the very best of reasons.

IX. No one can love unless he is impelled by the persuasion of love.

X. Love is always a stranger in the home of avarice.

XI. It is not proper to love any woman whom one should be ashamed to marry.

XII. A true lover does not desire to embrace in love anyone except his beloved.

XIII. When made public love rarely endures.

XIV. The easy attainment of love makes it of little value; difficulty of attainment makes it prized.

XV. Every lover regularly turns pale in the presence of his beloved.

XVI. When a lover suddenly catches sight of his beloved his heart palpitates.

XVII. A new love puts to flight an old one.

XVIII. Good character alone makes any man worthy of love.

XIX. If love diminishes, it quickly fails and rarely revives.

XX. A man in love is always apprehensive.

XXI. Real jealousy always increases the feeling of love.

XXII. Jealousy, and therefore love, are increased when one suspects his beloved.

XXIII. He whom the thought of love vexes, eats and sleeps very little.

XXIV. Every act of a lover ends in the thought of his beloved.

XXV. A true lover considers nothing good except what he thinks will please his beloved.

XXVI. Love can deny nothing to love.

XXVII. A lover can never have enough of the solaces of his beloved.

XXVIII. A slight presumption causes a lover to suspect his beloved.

XXIX. A man who is vexed by too much passion usually does not love.

XXX. A true lover is constantly and without intermission possessed by the thought of his beloved.

XXXI. Nothing forbids one woman being loved by two men or one man by two women.

The problem with Andreas's work arises in Book III, which tends to make the interpretation of his philosophy somewhat complicated. In the third book, Andreas contradicts everything he has said in the previous two books, expressing the belief that extra-marital love, and therefore courtly love, is sinful. It is a complete reversal of the first two books. Critics continue to dispute how we should read Andreas's retraction. In "Desire in Language," Toril Moi describes "four main headings" into which readings of Andreas may be grouped:

1. Andreas defends courtly love. Books I and II are serious; Book III must be seen as a conventional piece of retraction only meant to save the author, a priest, from getting into trouble with the Church.

2. Andreas holds that both the Church and the adherents of courtly love are right. All three books are serious; Andreas is an exponent of the doctrine of 'double truth.'

3. Andreas defends the Church and condemns courtly love. Books I and II are ironic; Book III is serious and contains Andreas's real opinion.

4. All three books are ironic. Andreas has provided an entertaining, but not necessarily subversive, pastiche of scholasticism and courtly love alike.[34]

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[34]Toril Moi, "Desire in Language: Andreas Capellanus and the Controversy of Courtly Love," in Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology, and History, ed. David Aers (New York: St. Martin's, 1986), 14.

Later in this study, I will discuss two of the "most famous representatives of Reading 1," C.S. Lewis and Denis de Rougemont.[35] Denomy's The Heresy of Courtly Love supports the second of these readings, while D.W. Robertson is a "major" supporter of the third reading in his A Preface to Chaucer. Finally, E. Talbot Donaldson is known for his interpretation that "Andreas simply wanted to be outrageous," and "exaggerated the . . . anti-feminism of Book III" and that Andreas should be read as entirely ironic.[36] Whatever the reading, the importance of Andreas in defining the rituals and traditions of courtly love cannot be overlooked. Andreas's work expresses an essential contradiction in Western thought that has continued to plague writers and thinkers well into the twentieth century.

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[35]Moi, 14.

[36]Moi, 15.

C.S. Lewis

Lewis and Religion

> For nothing he has ever written [was] impersonal.[1]

C. S. Lewis wrote a great deal of his own fiction, including the popular Chronicles of Narnia, in a sort of allegorical prose. However, there has been much discussion as to the specific nature of Lewis's Christianity, including a number of books written about the subtle nuances of his theology in each of his works. An important discussion is raised in a book by Corbin Scott Carnell, The Bright Shadow of Reality: C.S. Lewis and the Feeling Intellect, about the effects of older literature and certain people in Lewis's life on his theology. Carnell explains that Lewis's faith was indeed affected by his Renaissance and Medieval studies.

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[1]Scott Corbin Carnell, Bright Shadow of Reality: C.S. Lewis and the Feeling Intellect. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1974), 30.

Writers such as Dante, Spenser, and Milton were the foundation for his theological studies, and although he was not formally trained, he was sufficiently well-versed in those periods to see how their Christianity provided the underpinnings of their poetic works.[2]

Soon, after Lewis began to develop a more serious interest in Christianity, he began to study St. Augustine, Bishop Thomas Hooker, and Tacitus. And while this education afforded him a great wealth of knowledge, he was unable to abandon their "simplicity and clearness" in order to deal with the "ambiguities" of his contemporary theologians.[3] Lewis had some difficulty in dealing with the existentialists and the neo-orthodoxy of the early twentieth century, but at the same time he was able to justify his faith in what was, to him, a much simpler manner.

Instead of dealing with the complex theories of his contemporaries, Lewis was drawn to the works of the Middle Ages for the source of his personal theology. He used much of his background in the medieval period to support his faith and solve theological problems. He came under attack

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[2]Carnell, 68.

[3]Carnell, 12

from his contemporaries, however, for being out of touch with the present. His answer to their criticism was

> not based on a Utopian view of that period but rather on his strong reaction against the uncritical acceptance of the contemporary climate of opinion. He [sought] to remind the reader how little space in time [was] the last fifty years or so and he [believed] that there is no better way to avoid provincialism than by reading the old books - at least two for every contemporary work.[4]

In any case, his theology was deeply rooted in the old works, which is perhaps one reason for his opinions on courtly love.

As for his being a Platonist, his rejection of the courtly consummated love speaks for itself. His was a belief in a higher sort of love that is not based on an earthly beauty. His discussion of the allegorical tradition included this dismissal, of sorts, of the courtly values. He was still supportive of those values which he considered "good," and did not entirely discount the tradition. An

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[4]Carnell, 70.

inquiry into his theological posture yields a bit more than the works alone. The relationship between his theology and his studies was a reciprocal one. His obviously expansive knowledge of the medieval period provided him with groundwork for his faith, and at the same time, his faith shaped some, if not all, of his work in the area of allegory.

The Allegory of Love

Lewis began writing The Allegory of Love in the early 1920's as part of his work towards a postgraduate degree. In 1935, after eight years of research and writing, Lewis published his work. Lewis himself commented on the topic of the book in a letter to an editor at the Oxford University Press, saying that

> the book as a whole has two themes: 1. The birth of allegory and its growth from what it is in Prudentius to what it is in Spenser. 2. The birth of the romantic conception of love and the long struggle between its earlier form (the

romance of adultery) and its later form (the romance of marriage).[5]

The immediate critical reaction to the work was one of enthusiastic praise. Critics, including Prof. R. W. Chambers of Oxford, compared this work to classics such as Bradley's Shakespearean Tragedy. Chambers was quoted as calling it "the greatest thing done in England for medieval studies since Ker's Epic and Romance."[6]

The first section of the work is concerned with the development of the allegorical love poem. More specifically, Lewis describes courtly love as an unavoidable topic in the discussion of allegory. Indeed, the roots of the allegorical love poem are to be found in the troubadours' songs and poetry. Lewis is not as concerned with the form or style as he is with the "sentiment," which he calls a "highly specialized sort" of love "whose characteristics may be enumerated as Humility, Courtesy, Adultery and the Religion of Love."[7] He also mentions briefly the relationship between courtly love and the feudal society that existed at the time of its creation, but he

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[5]Roger L. Green and Walter Hooper, C.S. Lewis: A Biography (London: Souvenir Press, 1988), 132-33.

[6]Green and Hooper, 136.

[7]Lewis, 2.

dismisses this notion as the essential element of the tradition. Rather, he says that the key element to courtly love is that it is an adulterous arrangement and that the lover is "normally addressing another man's wife," but "he seldom concerns himself much with her husband."[8] Finally, the relationship is seen as a worship of the god of love, almost a parody of religious rites and doctrines.

Lewis believed the appearance of courtly love and the development of the "erotic tradition" was a pivotal occurrence. We take for granted that love should be the topic of so much literature today, but the origins of the tradition were in the eleventh century in Provence. We are connected with the past, through various stages, and should see that love as an "ennobling passion" is a revolutionary concept that needs to be examined in order to understand where we are in the present. Even the modern code of manners, which arguably places women before men, can be traced to the concept of courtly love. Such deference to women does not exist in other societies, particularly Eastern ones.

In fact, Lewis says that the notion of romantic love was a "novelty," and that previously, love was considered as

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[8]Lewis, 3.

insanity at one extreme and, at the other, as no more than "the comfort and utility of a good wife."[9] There had always been some discomfort with the concept of love until the troubadours began composing their songs. Lewis traces the development of this idealized concept of love throughout the Middle Ages and includes his thoughts about the two most influential classical writers on love, Plato and Ovid. Lewis discounts the medieval writers who attached themselves to Plato, saying that they would not have been able to take even the first essential step in Plato's ascent towards a spiritual ideal. The courtly lovers could never detach their passion from the earthly object of their passion. Those people who called themselves Platonists during the Renaissance were merely adding a classical façade to a Gothic structure. The tradition that began in the eleventh century has so pervaded our ideas of love that we are unable to distinguish the false passion from the true emotion of love.

Lewis approaches the Roman poet Ovid in a sophisticated way inasmuch as he interprets Ovid's works as almost wholly ironical. The Art of Love by Ovid is regarded by Lewis as

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[9]Lewis, 4.

funny in its seriousness - too funny to be regarded as anything but a mockery:

> The very design of his Art of Love presupposes an audience to whom love is one of the minor peccadilloes of life, and the joke consists in treating it seriously - in writing a treatise, with rules and examples en règle for the nice conduct of illicit loves.[10]

By making himself a slave to the god of love, Ovid presents a very critical view of lovers, without being serious. In reality, according to Lewis, Ovid would not have even considered too seriously the women he called the "objects of love." They would have been "ordered out of the room before the serious conversation about books, or politics . . . began." Lewis points out that the behavior that Ovid mockingly recommends is interpreted seriously by the courtly lovers, and he raises the question of how an entire group of writers could "misunderstand him so consistently." Lewis's discussion of Ovid's works is a necessary prologue to his discussion of the religion of love. The subject of the

[10]Lewis, 5.

relationship between courtly love and Christianity, Lewis writes, "has been much misrepresented in the past."[11]

According to Lewis, the basic idea is that courtly love is based on an unconsummated love relationship outside marriage. The lovers were generally not married to each other and the relationship was based on the lover's pursuit of the beloved. The problem, of course, is that the sexual act was considered in some way evil. It was not entirely evil, but that some aspect of the act, more often than not the desire, was morally wrong. Lewis traces the development of different writers, mostly religious, to explain how people began to accept the sexual act in marriage.

From the sixth century, Lewis writes, "the act is innocent but the desire is morally evil."[12] Later, in the Middle Ages, Lewis cites Hugo of St. Victor as writing that the act might be "'excused' by the good ends of marriage."[13] Most of these writers agree that the evil in sex is a direct result of the fall of Adam and Eve, or at least some form of retribution for the fall. The pleasurable part of the

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[11]Lewis, 6.

[12]Lewis, 14.

[13]Lewis, 15.

sexual act can never be anything but morally evil, and that the desire is wrong as well.

Some of the later writers Lewis discusses move way from the fall as the reason for evil and begin to use the "weakness of [man's] reason" as the cause.[14] Desire is not a sin, although it is still wrong, but the loss of reason that accompanies the sexual act represents the real sin in sex. The argument is that God would not have created Eve if sex was a sin, but rather that some of the mist that surrounds sex, clouding man's ability to reason, is morally wrong.

Lewis places this theory "on the verge of the modern conception of love."[15] But while these writers have become more at ease with sexuality, they fall short of accepting passion. The medieval concept of love is a scholastic one, according to Lewis, which defines the passion as something which is transformed into something completely different from "appetite and affection,"[16] but in romantic love poetry, passion is seen as an ennobling force. The distinction Lewis tries to make is rather fine, but still

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[14]Lewis, 16.

[15]Lewis, 16.

[16]Lewis, 17.

important. Basically, for each rule the Church made concerning love and passion, the courtly lovers made their own to counter. When the Church taught that "the ardent lover even of his own wife is in mortal sin, they reply with the rule that true love is impossible in marriage."[17] This relationship began, as well, to give rise to what Lewis terms the "fourth mark of courtly love -[the] love religion of the god Amor."[18] Although Lewis comments on this topic earlier, he expands upon the idea that courtly love began to take on its own religious attributes, starting with Ovid.

However, while Ovid created his ideas in an almost tongue-in-cheek manner, many European poets in the twelfth century took it more seriously. At the same time, there were many French authors who recognized the parody for what it was intended to be and composed their works accordingly. Lewis cites Dante at the serious end of the spectrum, and considers the French to be at the other end. The French "religion of love," as Lewis describes it, is not necessarily a parody of the Church, but should be considered a "temporary escape, a truancy from the ardours of a religion that was believed into the delights of a religion

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[17]Lewis, 18.

[18]Lewis, 18.

that was merely imagined."[19] The French tradition of love poetry is a "metaphor. . . expanded into a system," that includes heaven, gods, saints, praying, sinning, and repenting.[20]

Lewis describes the poetry as traveling through Europe in two distinct paths. The first route is in a southerly direction, towards Italy, which eventually results in Dante's Divine Comedy. The second goes north, into northern France, in which there had already been established an "Ovidian tradition."[21] The product of the two is the twelfth-century French poetry, including that of Chrétien de Troyes.

Lewis and Chrétien de Troyes

Lewis describes the works of Chrétien as among the most influential in the courtly love tradition. His poems were the first to have love as the dominant theme, even before the influence of the troubadours reached him in the court of Champagne. The two poems Lewis mentions specifically are

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[19]Lewis, 21.

[20]Lewis, 21.

[21]Lewis, 23.

Erec and Enide and Lancelot. Eric, which Lewis cites as an early work, does not have adulterous love as its central theme. Indeed, it is a story about a married couple, which would seem entirely out of place in the courtly tradition.[22] But Lewis's point is to demonstrate Chrétien's development of the courtly love theme in his later works, under the Countess of Champagne.

Lancelot, at the other end of the spectrum, is the model courtly love story. It is based entirely on the secret love of the queen, Guinevere, and one of the king's most trusted knights, Lancelot. Lewis takes an opportunity to point out the religious practices of courtly love in the story, supporting an idea that he had previously discussed. He says about Lancelot,

> Although his love is by no means supersensual and is indeed carnally rewarded in this very poem, he is represented as treating Guinevere with saintly, if not divine, honours. . . . When he leaves her chamber, he makes a

[22]Lewis, 25.

> genuflexion as if he were before a shrine.[23]

This particular section of the poem is only one example of the kind of religion that Lewis describes in the courtly literature.

Lewis begins at this point to discuss more in depth the idea of allegory in the poetry of Chrétien de Troyes. At this early stage of the allegorical tradition, Chrétien is credited with having been "one of the first explorers of the human heart."[24] Allegory is the central idea behind Lewis's work, and he begins to trace the development of it here. Of the personifications he discusses, the character of Love is most relevant to my study.

In these poems Love becomes a personified god against whom all types of sins may be committed. Those who do not follow the god of love will be afforded only unhappiness. In Lancelot, an important idea is also developed:

> It is only the noblest hearts which Love deigns to enslave, and a man should

[23]Lewis, 29.

[24]Lewis, 29.

> prize himself the more if he is selected
> for such service.[25]

It is in these earliest of poems that we can look to see the ennobling qualities of love. The service of a man to his lady is among the highest of honors, enough to cement the traditional roles of men and women in place. Part of this central theme includes a man who would, through combat or seemingly impossible adventures, prove his worth to his lady. All of these features of the relationships between men and women are present in the works of Chrétien; however, a codified version of courtly values does not appear until Andreas Capellanus writes his De Arte Honeste Amandi.

Lewis on Andreas Capellanus

Lewis cites Andreas's work as a "professedly theoretical" one, with many of the same themes as the poetry that preceded it. His De Arte Honeste Amandi is in the form of "methodical instruction in the art of love-making."[26] Lewis recognizes Andreas's attempt to classify the love he describes as "Platonic" and rejects it, citing the fact that

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[25]Lewis, 32.

[26]Lewis, 33.

the entire objective of this type of love is "actual fruition."[27]

Andreas puts women in an interesting place as he defines their role in the relationships he describes. On the one hand, he says the lady has control over the relationship and, as Lewis points out, is "allowed free choice in her acceptance or rejection of a lover."[28] But as soon as she becomes someone's wife, the lack of secrecy in the relationship precludes it from being true love, or at least a courteous relationship. A wife has a sort of duty to love her husband; there is no free choice in the matter, and the husband cannot gain anything from the relationship.

Lewis spends some time discussing the "contributions" that Andreas makes to the religion of love.[29] The story in Andreas's work about the man lost in the forest is described by Lewis as part of a "parallelism" that Andreas draws between the Christian church and the religion of love. But the analogy does more to demonstrate the disparity between the two systems, rather than the similarities. The largest

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[27]Lewis, 33.

[28]Lewis, 34.

[29]Lewis, 37.

of these disparities, in Lewis's interpretation, seems to be the absence of true love in marriage. The courtly system is unable to accept the existence of love between married couples. In fact, "[the husband's] sin is heavier than that of the unmarried lover, for he has abused the sacrament of marriage"[30] in the courtly love system of ethics.

Finally, Lewis examines the puzzling third section of Andreas's work. Lewis's interpretation is that Andreas was being neither "joking" nor hypocritical. Rather, he was talking about the "worldly goodness" in things; that Andreas was contrasting the "really good" with the "really bad things: courage and courtesy and generosity, as against baseness."[31] Lewis's religious interpretation is readily visible in this section of the courtly love chapter. He is certain that the courtly system of ethics is no match for the larger, more secure church. When a love is bound to religion, as in Dante, unity is restored to the mind, and love can be treated with a solemnity that is whole-hearted. But where it is not so fused, it can never, under the shadow of its tremendous rival, be more than a temporary truancy.

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[30]Lewis, 41.

[31]Lewis, 42.

It may be solemn, but its solemnity is only for the moment.[32]

Here Lewis provides an important opinion of his own religious interpretation of Andreas's work, and the other works in the courtly love tradition. Although The Allegory of Love is his earliest work, there are hints of the religious conversion that would come to dominate his later writings.

In the end, his analysis of the courtly love tradition is based on his knowledge of historical occurrences and is influenced by his religious background. His exposure to the twentieth-century theologies has caused him to turn to examine the roots of the confusion that surrounds him. Lewis appears to be arguing that many of the people who take this courtliness seriously are merely being misled and that the only true love is found through the Church.

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[32]Lewis, 42.

Denis de Rougemont

Denis de Rougemont discusses the "Tristan Myth" in Love in the Western World. In the preface to the 1956 edition, he writes,

> My central purpose was to describe the inescapable conflict in the West between passion and marriage; and in my view that remains the true subject, the real contention of the book as it has worked out.[1]

De Rougemont analyzes the influence the myth of Tristan and Iseult and others like it have had on love in Western civilization. The first version of the work appeared in 1940, before the Second World War, and before de Rougemont was able to spend a few years in the United States. After these experiences, de Rougemont decided his book needed to

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[1]Denis De Rougemont, Love in the Western World, trans. Montgomery Belgion (1956; New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 8.

be revised. The second edition, which appeared in 1956, added a preface and a new chapter at the end.

De Rougemont's time in the United States "afforded [him] the opportunity of seeing that the passion myth . . . degraded to mere romance - [was] not in sight of exhausting its effects."[2] In fact, it is de Rougemont's contention that the American cinema was primarily responsible for injecting the myth into popular culture.

De Rougemont chooses the Tristan myth to support his argument because it represents the "one great European myth of adultery."[3] He is particularly aware of the connection between his contemporaries and the Tristan myth, and in his work he tries to establish the actual path which this relationship takes. Specifically, he describes his efforts as not unlike those of

> poets, [who] in order to get away from the current linguistic confusion, are wont to seek the remote origin of a word - the thing or action which this word first denoted - so I wish to connect

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[2]De Rougemont, 8.

[3]De Rougemont, 18.

> with this myth part of the disorder in contemporary matters[4]

De Rougemont must make a working definition of the myth as an institution in literature and society. To this end, he defines a myth as having "certain types of constant relations" which express "the rules of conduct of a given social or religious group." The Tristan story, according to de Rougemont, is still so much a part of our social framework, even after centuries since its appearance, that it can only be regarded as a myth primarily because of the "power which it wins over us."[5] The existence of a passion cult in the West is the direct result of this myth. As with most myths, the origins are obscure, so it is difficult if not impossible to determine the exact story as it was first told. However, as de Rougemont points out, the obscurity allows the myth to "speak plainly about certain social or religious matters" in a way that a simple moral treatise can not. The convention of the myth

> is needed to express the dark and unmentionable fact that passion is linked with death, and involves the

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[4]De Rougemont, 18.

[5]De Rougemont, 19.

> destruction of any one yielding himself
> up to it with all his strength.[6]

Because we are able to accept something less than reasonable behavior in myth, our sense of rationality is not disturbed quite so much when Tristan destroys himself and his lover, Iseult out of passion.

De Rougemont devotes some time to explaining exactly why he has decided to analyze this particular work in light of the fact that there are so many versions that have survived and that it seems awkward to have to accept certain versions and discount others. But in reality, it is precisely for this reason that he chose the Tristan myth. The existence of many variations of the story is testimony to its popularity and universality. Because the myth has become so much a part of the dreams of people in contemporary society, it is entirely appropriate to analyze it. He offers a two-fold reason for his analysis:

> First, social confusion reached a point
> at which the pursuit of immorality turns
> out to be more exhausting than
> compliance with the old moral codes. . .

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[6]De Rougemont, 21.

> and we are left with a dull and diluted pain, something unclean and gloomy.
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> My second reason is a desire to be quite clear about contemporary life. I fasten upon the Tristan myth because it enables me to offer a simple explanation of our present confusion and at the same time to set forth certain permanent relations which the scrupulous vulgarities of current psychologies submerge.[7]

De Rougemont promises to his reader to make an "objective" analysis of the work and leave the "charm" of the tale out of this investigation.

And so he does, summarizing the tale in a few pages. In an interesting chapter, "Some Riddles," he brings up a number of questions that the myth seems to leave unanswered. Most of these questions center on Tristan's motivation to stay loyal to King Mark, or exactly why Tristan could be considered a model of chivalry when he betrays the king so readily. In any case, the myth is rather inconsistent, from

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[7]De Rougemont, 25.

just a quick glance, and the disparities become even more apparent as we look further.

One particular subject that de Rougemont addresses is the conflict between chivalry and marriage. De Rougemont takes a realistic standpoint with regard to courtly chivalry and says that it "in all likelihood. . . was never more than an ideal" and that the people who were lamenting its decay were at the same time "striving for its fulfillment."[8] More importantly, de Rougemont recognizes that there were indeed two systems in conflict as evidenced by the myth's plot. There was the duty to one's king, the basic obligation of the feudal society, and the duty to one's lady, which was the result of the chivalric code. Interestingly enough, the chivalric code has been explained as an imitation of the feudal society although it allows the women to take the role of the lord. It is possible that the chivalric system was created in order to placate women and to make them think that they indeed had some control over men when, in reality, they had little or no real power. Whatever the case, the Tristan myth, as de Rougemont explains, demonstrates the essential conflict in courtly

[8]De Rougemont, 32.

literature: "that love and marriage were incompatible."[9] Tristan has the ability to take Iseult from King Mark, but he does not. Why is this so? Because the rules of courtly behavior also did not allow passion to "turn into a reality."[10] And while Tristan was involved in a passionate relationship with Iseult, he was still bound to some code to protect his lady's reputation. But there is something superficial in this explanation, inasmuch as the conflict is evident from the myth, there still seems to be no real reason for passion not to exist in a marriage.

In the process of proving his argument that the existence of passion in Western civilization is the result of this myth and others like it, de Rougemont suggests that a great deal of what people think is love is actually a love of being in love. This is to say that people do not actually love the person they say they do, but rather are enamored of the experience rather than its object. De Rougemont's reading of the Tristan story suggests that our whole culture's obsession with love is actually a fascination with the accoutrements of love. That which surrounds the lovers rather than what the lovers actually

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[9]De Rougemont, 34.

[10]De Rougemont, 35.

feel becomes the focus of relationships between men and women in our society.

De Rougemont cites a section of the story in which the two lovers are confronted by the hermit, Ogrin, who says to them,

> Love by force dominates you. How long will your folly last? Too long you have been leading this life. [11]

De Rougemont comments that "everything goes to prove that" Tristan and Iseult do not love each other. "Tristan loves the awareness that he is loving far more than he loves Iseult the Fair."[12] De Rougemont concludes that the focus of passion is on the notion of the passion itself, rather than the other person in the relationship, and that the partings of the lovers become a central characteristic of these relationships because it is exclusively during these partings that the lovers can profess their love to one another and to the passion between them. "What [the lovers]

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[11]Joseph Bédier, The Romance of Tristan and Iseult, trans. Hilaire Belloc, ed. Paul Rosenfeld (1945; New York: Vintage, 1965), 80.

[12]De Rougemont, 41.

need is not one another's presence, but one another's absence."[13]

This desire to part, then, gives rise to de Rougemont's next discussion on "The Love of Death." Ultimately, the lovers' need to part from each other and the obsession of the lovers with things that "obstruct" their love creates a situation in which Tristan is continually trying to prove himself. Superficially, it would seem that Tristan would be trying to prove his worth to his lady, Iseult. De Rougemont contends otherwise. Because the focus of the passion is not directed at the other half of the relationship, it doesn't matter who is on the other end.[14] Taking this idea a step further, the passion can be seen as almost self-centered, narcissistic at times: Tristan is only trying to prove to himself that he is capable of passion. The supreme test, of course, is one in which he would have to sacrifice himself.

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[13]De Rougemont, 42.

[14]There is proof of the importance that the love-potion assumes in the Tristan story. The love-potion has the effect of absolving the lovers of any blame or guilt because neither of them could choose whom they loved once they had swallowed it.

In pursuing this argument, de Rougemont mentions specifically the "popularization of psychoanalysis" in which "a shameful love finds expression in the symbols of a hieroglyphic language which the consciousness leaves undeciphered."[15] In order to understand this statement, it is necessary to understand the context in which it was written. At the time that de Rougemont was writing, the theories of Freud were becoming increasingly more popular. The idea that our subconscious fears and thoughts might actually be manifesting themselves in our outward behavior was a new concept that had started to become more widely accepted. In his analysis of the myth, de Rougemont reacts to this contemporary interpretation of human nature by comparing it to the effect of the love-potion. The potion, which provides an "alibi" for the lover's actions, is not unlike the unconscious desires that fuel our own actions.

In this "alibi," there is as well the idea that our obsession with passionate behavior has developed into what can only be described as a "death wish." That is to say, in Western society a predominant trait of our "psyche" has become a craving to prove ourselves through extreme affliction. De Rougemont recognizes this trait which

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[15]De Rougemont, 47.

"lacerates" man, and asks why it is that we pursue it with such fervor:

> The answer is that [man] reaches self-awareness and tests himself only by risking his life - in suffering and on the verge of death.[16]

At this point, it is interesting to note that a connection exists between our love of love and our "liking for war."[17]

As for the origins of the passion in Western society, de Rougemont devotes a great deal of time to discussing the religious, historical, and literary roots of the myth. He attributes some of the romantic notions to the Greek eros, or "Boundless Desire." Although the Greeks regarded love as a disorder, which often led to destruction, it was still seen a "natural expression."[18]

The major contributor to the ancient theories about love was Plato. In his Phaedrus and Symposium, he recounts a "frenzy that, spreading from the body, infects the spirit with malignant humours."[19] There is, however, a love that

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[16]De Rougemont, 51.

[17]De Rougemont, 55.

[18]De Rougemont, 60.

[19]De Rougemont, 61.

exists at some higher level, one in which the physical characteristics of passion no longer have the same meaning as before the ascent towards this divine love. De Rougemont also discusses the origins in the Celtic traditions, including the Druids, to whom he attributes the most ancient origins of the glorification of desire.

It is at this point that the author embarks on a discussion of East and West with respect to the propagation of the passion myth. By the term "East," de Rougemont signifies "an attitude of the human mind which has reached its highest and purest expression in the direction of Asia,"[20] and the belief that there is some universal "oneness" that can be achieved through meditation, as in the case of Yoga techniques, or some other method of ascension. The end result, however, is the loss of individual identity that is not evident in the Western religious experience, at least not to the same extent. According to this tradition, man and God are separated by a "fundamental abyss" which gives rise to the complete opposite experience of the "descent of God" to man in the communion, rather than the experience of unity in the Eastern tradition.[21] Following

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[20]De Rougemont, 69.

[21]De Rougemont, 70.

this discussion, de Rougemont discusses the rise of the courtly tradition in European society as

> a reaction to Christianity (and in particular to its doctrine of marriage) by people whose spirit, whether naturally or by inheritance, was still pagan.[22]

In order to make such a claim it is necessary to discuss the religious history of Europe just before the appearance of courtly love in the twelfth century.

De Rougemont accounts for the rise of the troubadours as part of a larger "historical event" which occurred in Provence during this time. The Cathars, or Albigensians believed in a basic "dualism" between matter and spirit, a belief considered to be in direct conflict with the teachings of Christianity. However, as de Rougemont explains, their religion did not disappear without a trace. Nor did they disappear without having some influence on the church which persecuted them. Indeed, according to de Rougemont, the entire idea of "the condemnation of the flesh" was of heretical origin.[23] De Rougemont supports an

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[22]De Rougemont, 74.

[23]De Rougemont, 82.

argument that the troubadours' songs and the troubadours themselves were largely influenced by the vanishing Cathars, who were at this time being "brutally devastated."[24] At the same time, there are a number of arguments that would seem to dispute this idea, not the least of which is the fact that the troubadours themselves never mentioned this alleged connection with Catharism. De Rougemont disputes this claim by citing Huizinga's work, The Waning of the Middle Ages, who explains that there was an entirely different religious attitude that existed during the Middle Ages:

> To a medieval man everything meant some other thing as in dreams, and this without any translation into concepts . . . he had no need to formulate the meaning of the symbols he used nor to become fully conscious of them. He was innocent of the rationalism which causes people today to abstract and empty of all the significant overtones the objects to which they attend.[25]

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[24]De Rougemont, 82.

[25]De Rougemont, 93-94.

While de Rougemont is explaining this apparent discrepancy within the argument associating the troubadours with the Cathars, he is also criticizing his contemporaries. De Rougemont's comments constitute a left-handed attack on psychoanalysis, which rests precisely on attributing "significant overtones" to dreams and to daily existence.

De Rougemont dismisses the modern notion that everything is driven by a sexual desire which may be beneath the surface of our consciousness. He refutes the majority of people who interpret the existence of courtly love as a tradition that came about as a result of a suppressed sexuality in the Middle Ages. Rather, he accounts for the appearance of this type of literature on a more objective level, arguing that the people who were responsible for the creation of the myth and the literature that perpetuated it were largely reacting to religious and historical circumstances. He concludes,

> Courtly love came into existence in the twelfth century during a complete revolution of the western <u>psyche</u>. It sprang up out of the same movement which forced upwards into the half light of our human consciousness . . . the

> worship of Woman, of the Mother, and of the Virgin.[26]

In the revised edition of this book, de Rougemont added a section devoted to the discussion of marriage in modern times, which he introduces by writing that "underlying the modern breakdown of marriage is nothing less than a struggle between two religious traditions, or . . . a decision which almost always we reach unconsciously."[27] One of the systems, set up by Christianity, is based on marriage as a sacrament, while the other to a certain degree promotes adultery. However, it is still difficult to attribute a modern decline in the institution of marriage to a set of nearly ancient ideologies. But it is easy to see how these theologies have made their way through our literature and have made their way down to contemporary society. What de Rougemont terms the "middle class morals" can be seen to have two sides. First, we are still raised to consider marriage as a sacrament, but all the while we are bombarded by popular literature extolling passion as the "supreme test." The result is conflict since

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[26]De Rougemont, 122.

[27]De Rougemont, 137.

> passion and marriage are essentially irreconcilable. Their origins and their ends make them mutually exclusive.[28]

De Rougemont deduces that another reason for the breakdown of marriage is the disappearance of certain "compulsions" that at one time drove people to marry. The idea that a marriage could be arranged between two people of different families in order to create an alliance has become archaic. Now, marriages are prompted increasingly by "individual circumstances."[29]

These circumstances often include the idea that we are attracted to what the cinema makes us believe is attractive. The cinema and other forms of popular art are responsible for engendering the myth in our current society, although the popularization of the myth has distorted it to a great extent. "People are not unaware that passion is a woe, but they imagine that such a woe will be more splendid and 'vital' in a way ordinary life cannot be."[30] The myth has come down to us for so long as representing something more exciting in life that our senses are drawn to it. We

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[28]De Rougemont, 277.

[29]De Rougemont, 278.

[30]De Rougemont, 281.

believe that having a passionate relationship will ensure happiness when in actuality the pursuit of such a relationship does nothing but make us miserable. Once again, de Rougemont comments about his contemporaries:

> It has got to be admitted that passion wrecks the very notion at a time when there is being attempted the feat of trying to ground marriage in values elaborated by the morals of passion.[31]

In addition, de Rougemont comments on the current state of marriage in the United States:

> To try to base marriage on a form of love which is unstable by definition is really to benefit the State of Nevada.[32]

It is quite easy from this work to see de Rougemont's disappointment with twentieth-century values. The modern notion of Freudian analysis has given men and women in the twentieth century the desire to get more out of a relationship than had previously been expected. The idea of women's equality may deprive men of the objects of their passion, and women may eventually realize the power the myth

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[31]De Rougemont, 286.

[32]De Rougemont, 292.

has held over them for so long. In either case, it becomes apparent that de Rougemont has made a thorough attempt to discredit the notion that passion is a natural occurrence. In de Rougemont's opinion, we have been conditioned by a myth that was created 800 years ago - a myth that was created in religious and social upheaval and that is still being propagated by the magazines we read and the movies we watch. It has become time, in light of the breakdown of marriage as an institution, to realize that trying to build a relationship on something inherently unstable will cause it to collapse. Now, we must begin to accept a higher form of love, such as the Platonic form, which aspires to beauty in a much less physical sense, in order to prevent the collapse of society. De Rougemont's is a stoic view of human nature based on the amount of credit he gives to rational thought and logic. The most successful periods of Western civilization were times that reason and logic prevailed, such as during the seventeenth century, when

> the analytic treatment of passion by such writers as Descartes, its conversion to clearly distinct psychological categories and to rational hierarchies of qualities, worthiness, and faculties, must of necessity have

> brought about the dissolution of the myth and the arrest of its original impetus.[33]

De Rougemont would have us completely do away with passion in society, and he eschews the concepts of Freudianism such as the ego, superego, and id. He depends, instead, on man's ability to reason and make rational choices, when the passion myth is not clouding his faculties. As long as we cling to the myth, we will continue to be miserable. According to de Rougemont, true happiness demands a cerebral approach, which is possible only after we recognize the myth for what it actually is and make a conscious effort to uproot it from the Western psyche.

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[33]De Rougemont, 206-7.

Marion Zimmer Bradley

The Mists of Avalon

Written in 1982 by Marion Zimmer Bradley, The Mists of Avalon marks one of the most radical reworkings of the traditional Arthurian legend stories. The most obvious of these differences is the narrative style. The greater part of the story is written from the perspective of the women who were involved in the legend of King Arthur.

A discussion of this work must include some background on the feminist criticism movement. In her introduction to The New Feminist Criticism, Elaine Showalter comments on the impact the feminist movement has made on the area of literary criticism:

> Since the late 1960's, when feminist criticism developed as part of the international women's movement, the assumptions of literary study have been profoundly altered. Whereas it had

> always been taken for granted that the representative reader, writer, and critic of Western literature is male, feminist criticism has shown that women readers and critics bring different perceptions and expectations to their literary experience, and has insisted that women have also told the important stories of our culture.[1]

Without venturing too far into the world of feminist criticism, it is not difficult to imagine the influence women have had on literature. What is of importance is the fact that this movement is a powerful one, even in its relative infancy. The 1970's represent for the feminists a time of growth and wider acceptance of their criticism. In existence since the early part of this century, the feminist movement began to take a more outspoken role in literary circles during the mid to late 1970's.[2] Bradley's work, thus springs from the larger women's movement around her. She has, as many authors before her, responded to the

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[1]Elaine Showalter, "The Feminist Critical Revolution," in The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 3.

[2]Showalter, 6.

surrounding climate. In essence, it probably seemed the time for the Arthurian legend to be written from the women's perspective. The inspiration to write a work such as this comes from inside, but the impetus to complete this sort of radical interpretation is a reaction to external circumstances. As did Lewis and de Rougemont, Bradley is reacting to her particular situation, in which she recognizes the opportunity to make a feminist statement using a decidedly un-feminist tradition.

An important question raised by feminist literature is whether or not a work should be considered feminist just by virtue of the fact that it was written by a woman. In an essay entitled "Are Women's Novels Feminist Novels?" Rosalind Coward questions the assumption that all novels by women are necessarily feminist. She writes,

> even novels which have a surface commitment to feminism should be interrogated as to by what representations of sexuality, of maleness and femaleness, they achieve their version of reality.[3]

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[3]Rosalind Coward, "Are Women's Novels Feminist Novels?" Feminist Review 5 (1980), rpt. in The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 228.

As far as The Mists of Avalon novel is concerned, it is conspicuous from the first that Bradley is using the Arthurian legend to make a feminist point. Bradley's characters and subject matter make it difficult to read without acknowledging the feminist undertones that are present throughout the work. An Arthurian story written from the perspective of the women involved, written by a woman, deserves to be read as a feminist work, representative of contemporary ideas about the tradition of chivalry and courtly love.

The first character the reader meets is Morgaine[4] who, in the prologue, speaks from the perspective of an older woman near the end of her life. The adventures have ended, King Arthur lies in his grave, hidden by the magical mists of Avalon; and the powers of the Lady of the Lake have begun to give way to the Christian God. Morgaine says:

> I have no quarrel with the Christ, only with his priests, who call the Great Goddess a demon and deny that she ever

[4]Bradley uses variants of the spellings of the character's names. Lancelet is Lancelot, Gwenhwyfar is Guinevere, and Morgaine is Morgan le Fay.

> held power in this world. At best, they say that her power was of Satan.[5]

From the beginning of the novel, a conflict between the Christians and the people of Avalon is apparent, but the most interesting aspect of this conflict is that it is clear that the people of Avalon follow a "female" religion, while Christianity is decidedly "male" in orientation. At this point, the clash is over, and Christianity has apparently won out over the religion of Avalon. Morgaine professes to be the teller of the tale "before the priests of the White Christ came to cover it all" with their coloring of the story of Arthur's court. Clearly, she is feeling bitter at what has happened. The Christians are portrayed as intolerant and altogether male-oriented. They have closed the "door" between the magic of Avalon and the real world and have begun a tradition of prejudice against anything which is not part of their religion. Whatever is not related to Christ is shunned, even persecuted, as was the case with the idea of witchcraft. Whether or not witchcraft actually existed, there was a religion that existed which today we know as Druidism.

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[5]Marion Zimmer Bradley, The Mists of Avalon (New York: Ballantine, 1982), ix.

The Druids were noted for their close association with nature, but they have also been accused of performing human sacrifice as well as a number of sexually oriented rituals. Bradley portrays the people of Avalon as having this connection with nature, which provides them with the ability to experience the supernatural:

> In Avalon the highest virtue was to give your body over to the God or Goddess in union with all of the flow of nature.[6]

This experience was in direct conflict with the Christians, who valued chastity above almost all else. While the conflict existed, the Druids were a great deal more tolerant of the Christians.

The friction between the two religions continues to surface because King Arthur is made king by both the Christians and the Druids. Each has a claim to the throne through Arthur although much of the conflict is latent rather than overt at the beginning of the story. Viviane, who is both the High Priestess of Avalon and the Lady of the Lake, manages to convince Uther Pendragon to send Arthur away to be fostered by another family. Viviane wants Uther to give his son to be reared in Avalon, but Uther declines,

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[6]Bradley, 217.

remarking that when it is time for Arthur to take the throne the "isle will be all Christian."[7] He distrusts the magic of Avalon, and Viviane offers another solution: to have Arthur raised away from his father, by his trusted vassal Ectorius. Uther acquiesces, but not before making his distrust of Avalon plain. Viviane's reaction is collected and calm, but her loyalty to the goddess builds resentment inside her. She knows the power the Druidic tribes once held over England and feels it slipping away to this new religion. Uther still bears the marks of his experience with the Druids, who were responsible for naming him as king, and would do the same for his son Arthur, when the time came.

When Arthur is sworn in as king of England, he undergoes a long ritual in Avalon, which includes a number of Druid mystical rites. When he has proven himself, the High Priestess of Avalon gives Arthur a sword.[8] The Lady of the Lake charges young Arthur with his duties as king of England and bids him to swear an oath

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[7]Bradley, 127.

[8] In some of the other versions of this story, the Lady of the Lake gives Arthur Excalibur; here, Bradley has expanded upon this episode to include the ritual on Avalon as proof that the Druids were considered a powerful faction in England before the Saxons invaded.

> to deal fairly with all men, whether or no they follow the God of the Christians. . . For whatever the Christians say, Arthur Pendragon, and whatever they may call their God, all the Gods are as one God, and all the Goddesses but one Goddess.[9]

Clearly, the Druids have been in existence for some time, feel unthreatened by the Christians, and are willing to coexist with them peacefully. They have no need to exclude the Christians from the island; indeed, they show a great deal more respect for the Christians than they receive in return. But history, and Morgaine, speak otherwise. By the time Morgaine begins telling the story, the Druids have all but been removed from power. According to the Christians, Druidism is connected with Satan and should be completely disregarded. However much resentment they suffer from the Christians, the Druids are still able to accept them without conflict.

Arthur, on the other hand, is portrayed as a man sensitive to the promises he made on becoming king of the Britons, and he realizes the conflict that he faces in this

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[9]Bradley, 204.

position. He has sworn loyalty to both the Druids in their ceremonial rites and to the Christians in the coronation ceremony. Having been raised a Christian, however, his first loyalty seems to be to the church. The turning point is just before the battle at Mount Badon. Gwenhwyfar has sewn a new banner for King Arthur to use in battle, the famous banner of Christ and the Virgin Mary. Arthur is reluctant to carry it into battle, but is convinced by the queen that he should. The Pendragon banner, which represents the Druidic influences on the throne, is laid aside. Under a great deal of pressure from the queen because of her recent miscarriage, Arthur decides to carry only the Christian banner into the battle. Finally, confronted by King Lot, who is distressed at marching under the new banner, King Arthur says,

> we are a Christian folk, and we fight under the banner of Christ and the Virgin.[10]

The tribes are distraught, almost to the point of revolting, until Arthur exercises his authority as king. Lancelet offers to carry the banner, but the possibility exists that two banners of such great influence might create among the

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[10]Bradley, 395.

Britons a division in the ranks. Arthur decides the fate of the Pendragon banner, and with it, ensures the s`ow descent from power of the Lady of the Lake and the rest of Avalon.

Aside from the religious conflict, there is the greater contention that exists between men and women in this particular society. By equating the shift of power in this society with the switch in religious influences, Bradley explains rather clearly that women were at one time much more powerful. The period preceding the Christian movement was dominated to a large extent by women. With the increased influence of Christianity, the power that women hold begins to decrease.

Morgaine and Gwenhwyfar illustrate the disparity in the two religious systems, as well as the two types of women that existed at the time. Morgaine and Igraine, her mother, represent the strong, independent women of the Druidic influence, who are not dominated by the men in their lives. More than her mother who has married into Christendom, Morgaine is raised as a priestess of the Island of Avalon and becomes well-versed in the ways of "magic." She is taken to Avalon by Viviane and spends seven years learning the secrets of the "old people." In trying to convince

Igraine to let Morgaine go, Viviane explains a fundamental difference in the two religions:

> They believe . . . that there is no Goddess; for the principle of woman, so they say, is the principle of all evil; through woman, so they say, Evil entered this world; there is some fantastic Jewish tale about an apple and a snake.[11]

Igraine was required to marry Gorlois to seal an alliance between Avalon and Cornwall. She had been raised as a priestess of Avalon, but she gave up her position once she married Gorlois. To a certain extent she represents the middle ground between Gwenhwyfar and Morgaine. Eventually, Igraine gives up her old religion completely to become a Christian and dies as the headmistress of a nunnery.

Gwenhwyfar presents perhaps the most complicated of characterizations. She is taken out of complete obscurity to become the High Queen, and so she is a very "simple" person, deeply committed to her Christian upbringing. At the same time, she understands that her priority in Arthur's eyes must always be second to that of the kingdom. She

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[11]Bradley, 11.

accepts the little power she has, and it isn't until much later that she begins to assert herself. It is through Gwenhwyfar that Bradley presents the problem of womanhood in the Christian society as she views it.

There is the duty that Christian doctrine places on the wife and queen to her husband and king. From the start, Gwenhwyfar has been raised to believe that women had a certain station in life, second to men. In her thoughts after her marriage to Arthur, Gwenhwyfar reveals what the Christians have been teaching their children:

> Women had to be especially careful to do the will of God because it was through a woman that mankind had fallen into Original Sin in Eden. No woman could ever be really good except for Mary Mother of Christ; all other women were evil, they never had any chance to be anything but evil.[12]

It is actually hard to believe that a woman could have such thoughts, but the thorough "brainwashing" of women, especially the young maidens, has apparently reduced women to think very little of themselves. Indeed, many kings held

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[12]Bradley, 268.

their land and livestock as high or higher than their wives, or queens. Gwenhwyfar has a low opinion of herself, which is understandable. She has been summoned by the king to be made queen sight unseen. Hers will be a marriage of convenience for Arthur, and she is worried that she will become only another addition to his possessions. For all her worrying, though, she is more concerned that the King like her looks. She has been conditioned to believe that men such as Arthur are interested only in a woman's appearance, which to a large extent was probably true. She makes no mention of whether or not her intended husband will take her seriously as a queen because she does not consider herself worthy of such regard. This attitude comes across as humility to the point that there is some question as to her ability to become a High Queen. Even Igraine, who is sent to escort Gwenhwyfar back to Arthur, thinks that she is "childish."[13] Her development as a character takes some time, and before the end of the story, she is able to stand on her own, with her feet firmly planted in her Christian, albeit subservient, faith.

For all her meekness, Gwenhwyfar recognizes her particular situation early on in her relationship with

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[13]Bradley, 270.

Arthur. The question of an heir to the throne comes up soon after they are married, and Arthur suggests that any child she has will be regarded as the royal heir and will be raised accordingly. Arthur implies that if Gwenhwyfar decides to have an affair, it will not bother him. Indeed, it seems that he is suggesting that she actively seek a lover, and Gwenhwyfar thinks immediately of Lancelet. But she at once becomes confused and unsure of her feelings:

> Suddenly and for the first time in her life she envied both Arthur and Lancelet. They were men, they lived lives of activity, they must go out into the world and risk death or worse in battle. . . How could she, a woman, make that decision?[14]

Gwenhwyfar doesn't give herself credit as far as being responsible for much of anything. Bradley implies that a Christian upbringing has created this inferiority complex in Gwenhwyfar. At this time, Gwenhwyfar does nothing to act upon her feelings, retreating once again to her Christian faith. Bradley has Gwenhwyfar compare herself to Morgaine,

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[14]Bradley, 335.

pressing the point that Morgaine represents a much stronger, independent woman.

> Morgaine would surely say it was for her to choose whether or no she would take Lancelet as a lover.[15]

Gwenhwyfar relies on her religious background to provide her with strength to get through this predicament while Morgaine would tell her to make her own decision. Once more, the fundamental conflict between these competing religions is apparent.

The affair which finally develops between Gwenhwyfar and Lancelet has a different twist in Bradley's version. Gwenhwyfar is unable to bear Arthur any children, and therefore, he has no heir to the throne. Before the pagan rituals of midsummer are set to commence, Arthur suggests to Lancelet and Gwenhwyfar the possibility that they could participate in the rituals, and perhaps Gwenhwyfar would become pregnant. In this version, Arthur not only gives his consent to Lancelet's and Gwenhwyfar's union, but he actually initiates the plan and convinces Gwenhwyfar to sleep with Lancelet. Arthur's only concern is that the

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[15]Bradley, 336.

child will be his heir, and when Gwenhwyfar hesitates, he offers to join them in their tryst so as to placate Gwenhwyfar:

> then should a child come of this, then you may swear without any untruth that this child was conceived in your marriage bed, and none of us need ever know for certain[16]

Indeed, this version is different from any other, and perhaps represents another feminist view. Gwenhwyfar is too weak to say no to Arthur in his pursuit of an heir to the throne. Arthur represents a manipulative king with only the kingdom in mind. Of course, this episode is typical of the age-old conflict between a king's duty to his realm and his queen. Arthur chooses the kingdom in this instance, and backs Gwenhwyfar into a corner from which she cannot escape. He plays on her emotions, reminding her of her duty to the kingdom to provide him an heir. He also recognizes the feelings that exist between her and Lancelet, assures them that he understands, and does not hold it against them that they are in love. Gwenhwyfar thinks,

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[16]Bradley, 449.

> for it had come about that she should
> have Lancelet, and without guilt, with
> her husband's own will and permission[17]

Her thoughts, as a Christian, naturally turn to guilt. The guilt associated with an adulterous affair has kept Gwenhwyfar from acting upon her feelings, and now Arthur has absolved her of any remorse. It isn't long before she concedes and takes Lancelet as her lover. Still, Gwenhwyfar's acquiescence represents in some way the subservience of women in the Christian society. She is her king's property and, as such, must comply with his demands. There exist few arguments to counter the claim that "conditions . . . forced women to occupy a low place in society" during this time in history.[18] This scene suggests that even the High Queen would be subject to complete domination by her husband and lord.

The quest for the Holy Grail, in this rendition, represents Arthur's and England's final break with Druidism, and the land of Avalon. Morgaine observes a special mass at the chapel in Camelot in which Bishop Patricius uses a set

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[17]Bradley, 449.

[18]Sidney Painter, French Chivalry: Chivalric Ideas and Practices in Mediaeval France, (1940; Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1957), 101.

of holy items, including a holy chalice, from Avalon to perform a Christian Mass. For Morgaine, this service symbolizes a complete desecration of her religion, to be conducted "in the narrow name of that Christ who calls all Gods demons, unless they invoke his name."[19] Unfortunately by this time it is too late, and the transformation of England into a Christian land is nearly complete. The Holy Grail, Morgaine decides,

> must go from this world forever, safely into Avalon, never again to be touched or profaned by mortal men. . . they have been defied by their moments on a Christian altar.[20]

Morgaine uses her powers to send the pieces of holy regalia back to Avalon, and everyone present believes that the chapel has been visited by God. Sir Gawaine is the first to pledge himself to recovering the Grail, and soon, the rest of the knights have also sworn themselves to the quest.

The final development of Gwenhwyfar, after the quest has begun, depicts her in a nearly hypocritical light. She

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[19]Bradley, 770.

[20]Bradley, 772.

has been raised as a Christian and has dedicated all her efforts to spreading the Christian influence in her husband's court. At the same time, she regards Lancelet as her only true love. In effect, her adulterous behavior has been a mockery of the church's ideal of devotion and purity, even if Arthur gave them permission. She has been living a lie, and her hypocritical existence becomes almost a farce before the end of the story.

Bradley's version of the Arthurian legend comes at a time when many people have begun to look at "traditional" role of men and women in society. The Mists of Avalon represents a rather significant departure from the original story, but its popular acceptance implies that this revision is appealing to a large audience of people who received Bradley's ideas favorably. By turning back to this tradition, Bradley implies that the roots of women's repression go back to the beginnings of the chivalric tradition. Her portrayal of the period before Christianity took hold in England as an era in which women were more powerful clearly implies that the influence of Christianity has been mainly to subjugate women. Christianity today, or at least the Western Judeo-Christian value system, continues to repress women, according to Bradley. The existence of a

time before this repression began also implies that the West can do away with the male dominated stereotype if we look beyond the church and the priests who administer their religion to the people. The attitude of intolerance in Christianity does not come from the religion itself, but rather from the priests who had to establish themselves in England. In order to situate themselves, the priests had to displace the religion that existed at the time. In this sense, the priests represent the agents through which the repression of women began. The continuance of this domination is the result of many years of Christian influence in the West. Bradley links the Christian faith to the second class status of women in this work. By using this well-known tradition, she is able to provide at once a fresh alteration of the tale and sharp condemnation of the tradition, as well.

Conclusions

The tradition of courtly love that began over 800 years ago has continued to affect our current ideas of the roles men and women play in society. The question, of course, is whether or not we should continue to hold on to this tradition, given the evolution of women's roles in Western civilization. Over the past two decades, the women's movement has, if anything, increased in size and influence, and has become a more assertive force in almost every facet of modern living. More importantly, the role of women in the American military has developed to the point that there are now women serving in all branches of the service, in almost every capacity.

At this point, it becomes necessary to discuss the significance of courtly love as it relates to our current notions of sexual equality. Is this tradition

> a codification and institutionalization
> of a complex characterized of
> essentially ambivalent attitudes toward

> the female: a complex characterized by all the attributes of ardent romantic love and by all the attributes of hatred and fear,[1]

as suggested by some? Does the tradition of chivalry represent, as still others suggest, a deliberate oppression of women?

> While males monopolized political and economic power, they made their domination more palatable by surrounding it with an elaborate ritual of deference and politesse.[2]

Or is courtly love merely responsible for refining the manners of an otherwise barbaric society? The knights became subject to rules of etiquette, just as they had been subject to rules regarding their conduct in battle. Previously, women were considered "chattel" and "omitted from the business of the court,"[3] but they soon became

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[1]Melvin Askew, "Courtly Love: Neurosis As Institution," Psychological Review 52 (1965): 28.

[2]Christopher Lasch, The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations (New York: Norton, 1978), 189.

[3]Askew, 27.

"recognized as judges of behavior and . . . trail-blazers of culture."[4]

In any case, it becomes obvious that the courtly tradition is riddled with inconsistencies. C. S. Lewis and Denis de Rougemont both pointed out that these inconsistencies could have any number of explanations. My hope in conducting this study was to expose these disparities in the tradition and perhaps to offer some alternative. The courtly love and chivalric traditions have become a part of our society without much question as to their usefulness. Chivalry deals primarily with the relationships of men while courtly love provides rules for the interaction of men and women. At some point, it becomes necessary to analyze these traditions so as to assure ourselves that we are not continuing to hold on to something that may hinder our progress. Those traditions that prove worthy should endure. Those that do not should be cast aside or altered to fit the needs of the people who use them. A tradition such as courtly love, which is based on the assumption of certain roles for each of the sexes, is destined to come under some scrutiny as to its continued validity.

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[4]Herbert Moller, "The Meaning of Courtly Love," Journal of American Folklore 73 (1960): 48.

Chivalry, in its narrowest form, was the term used to name the "art" of horsemanship. The word chevalier

> denotes a man of aristocratic standing . . . who is capable, if called upon, of equipping himself with a war horse and the arms of a heavy cavalryman.[5]

In its earliest development, chivalry encompassed the rules and standards of conduct between men on the battlefield. Courtly love developed alongside this tradition, providing customs for the behavior of men and women. Courteous behavior became as much a part of our image of the knight as his horse and sword. As I have discussed earlier, Andreas Capellanus offers the exact rules of love, although there is still some question as to how seriously his work should be taken. In "Male Fantasy and Female Reality in Courtly Literature," Joan Ferrante discusses Andreas's work as merely a "rhetorical game" based on "the conventions of courtly literature."[6] According to Ferrante, Andreas's work provides perhaps the best example of the inconsistencies in this tradition. The dialogues he

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[5]Maurice Keen, Chivalry (New Haven: Yale UP, 1984), 1.

[6]Joan M. Ferrante, "Male Fantasy and Female Reality in Courtly Literature," Women's Studies 11 (1984): 78.

provides between the men and women are logically difficult to follow, at best. Men of the highest nobility who try to court those women of the lower classes get their arguments turned around and thrown back at them, as they continue to "rely on artificial courtly conventions."[7] Indeed, it is difficult to imagine that any sound argument could be based on the thirty-one "Rules of Love" described in De Amore.

C. S. Lewis and Denis de Rougemont both analyze their particular situations by turning back to the heritage of the courtly tradition. Lewis discusses courtly love from the aspect of its contribution to allegory. His religious background permeates much of his work, and this discussion is no exception. His most famous work of this period, The Screwtape Letters, has been described as one of the most influential Christian works during a period that saw

> assiduous effort on the part of the modern Church in the West to "de-supernaturalize" the ancient Faith under the gun of German romanticism, higher criticism, Darwinism, Freudianism and so

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[7]Ferrante, 81.

> forth (this effort was called "modernism").[8]

His perception of a loss of faith in moral or religious values at the time that he wrote compelled him to examine the tradition of courtly love and analyze the roots of atheism. While The Allegory of Love is not a "Christian" work, it is, nevertheless, written from the perspective of a deeply religious person, who is concerned for a situation in which he sees a prevailing loss of faith as directly related to the development of the "religion of love" by the authors of courtly love. By personifying a "God of love," the courtly lovers have created an alternative to the one true God, according to Lewis. While his is a religious explanation, it still emphasizes the fundamental conflict that exists with this tradition: courtly love provides rules for love which are in and of themselves contradictory to many of our society's values. Adulterous love is forbidden by society, but the first rule in courts of love is that there can be no real love between married couples. Lewis was distressed by the acceptance of Freudian analysis and other modernist theories, which he described as "the

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[8]Thomas Howard, The Achievement of C. S. Lewis (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw, 1980), 9.

dark and stuffy room of modernity."[9] Instead of relying on the hard science of psychology or the laboratory, Lewis felt that Western society should, in effect, return to the fundamental values that the Church provided. In its simplest form, the greater part of Lewis's work was a reaction to "the program of modernity" in which he tried to provide "some reminder" of the possibility of living a religious life.[10]

While reacting to many of the same phenomena, de Rougemont ends up in a very different place from Lewis. De Rougemont is also dissatisfied with the modern notions of the ego, superego and id made popular by the Freudian analysts, which he calls "the scrupulous vulgarities [of] current psychologies."[11] Lewis describes the passion that exists in society as essentially misplaced love of God. De Rougemont says that this passion is a "myth" perpetuated by popular culture. De Rougemont contends that the modern preoccupation with psychoanalysis is the result of an overcomplicated society that is looking for even more complex answers to questions about themselves. People in

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[9]Howard, 13.

[10]Howard, 14.

[11]De Rougemont, 25.

the middle ages did not have to worry about the "symbols" in daily life; they needed only to have a simple faith. Dreams were only dreams, not subconscious rationalizations of inner thoughts coming to the surface when one was asleep and vulnerable.

As does Lewis, de Rougemont attributes the basic conflict in courtly literature as stemming from the fact that "love and marriage [are] incompatible."[12] De Rougemont explains that the breakdown of marriage in the twentieth century is largely the result of our fixation on this passion. We have been brainwashed to believe in passion, which de Rougemont believes is inherently destructive. De Rougemont's solution is to remove this obsession with passionate love from the Western psyche and replace it with the pursuit of a higher form of love, more along the lines of Plato. De Rougemont, at this point, leaves a great deal unsaid. Exactly how are we supposed to undo a tradition that has held us for over 800 years without causing a complete upheaval? In this respect, Love in the Western World is somewhat disappointing. After developing his theory on the existence of passion in Western society, comparing it with some Eastern traditions, de Rougemont

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[12]De Rougemont, 34.

stops short of offering a real solution. In "Beyond Tragedy," the last chapter, de Rougemont claims to have suggested "glimpses" of a solution throughout the book.[13] In the end, his "diagnosis" seems to be a weak one. "[Siding] with moderation," de Rougemont ends up in an ambiguous position, hardly proposing much other than taking the middle of the road approach: leaning neither too much towards passion nor towards superrational nihilism.

Finally, Bradley's revision of the Arthurian legend provides a contemporary and decidedly feminist version of the courtly love tradition. The story of Arthur is, of course, the paragon for chivalric ideals. Each character represents a different part of the tradition, and the entire story of the Knights of the Round Table has come to be known as the definition of courtliness. Why would a feminist find material in this particular story, when most women believe that this system degrades women? It is for precisely this reason that a feminist might choose to revise a sexist tradition. By writing from the perspective of women, Bradley can completely overturn the tradition. Even if her version is not as widely accepted and her explanations for certain occurrences such as Lancelet's and Gwenhwyfar's

[13]De Rougemont, 319.

affair do not replace the older rendition, she is still taken seriously, and The Mists of Avalon has become an interesting next chapter in the Arthurian legend. Bradley responds to her surroundings by providing a completely revised version of an old set of tales about the Round Table. That she is accepted and even praised for this reinterpretation is confirmation of the fact that the society of which she is a part is ready for such a departure from the tradition. Her final statement about women seems to be that the shift to Christianity stripped women of their place in society. Christianity and Western society have subjugated women to a secondary role, and the continuing influence of this religious faith has even further suppressed women. Overall, from her characterizations of the women in the story, it is plain to see that the Judeo-Christian faith has something to do with the role of women in society becoming something less than it might have been. Bradley clearly demonstrates how capable women can be because her powerful female characters are at once formidable and believable.

All three authors have turned to this tradition during times of crisis. Their conclusions about the tradition are different, of course, but the fact remains that each of them thought it appropriate to explain their current situation in

terms of this tradition, or, in Bradley's case, condemn the present circumstances concerning sexual equality. The fact that so many authors have returned to such a tradition is testimony enough as to its strength. Even in its various forms, courtly love has made a severe impact on the way men and women interact in Western society. But its many inconsistencies seem to belie an underlying conflict that cannot be resolved.

Our military tradition in the United States, with all its diverse variations, has a strong connection to the chivalric tradition. At a recent Joint Services Conference on Professional Ethics (JSCOPE XII) held at the National Defense University, one of the topics discussed was "Comradeship, Fraternization, and Sex Discrimination." A number of papers were presented on the topic of women in the military, addressing specifically the issue of women in the combat arms. These writers, many of them military officers, argue that the "combat exclusion laws" that exist today are founded on antiquated notions that only men can experience "combat comradeship."[14] Additionally, the prevailing attitude in these papers is one that examines the

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[14]CPT John D. Becker, USA, "Male Soldiers, Female Soldiers, and the Notion of Comradeship" (Paper delivered at the Joint Services Conference on Professional Ethics XII, Washington, DC, 11 January 1990), 15.

implications of allowing women in combat from a professional and extremely objective perspective. CPT Kelly Fitzpatrick, USA, writes,

> If training can effect comradeship among men, surely it has an impact on units consisting of both male and female soldiers as well. . . . realistic training allows all soldiers to recognize that they are dependent on each other for survival.[15]

Another study examines the possibility of women becoming prisoners of war and concludes with the following thoughts:

> As Americans' views toward traditional male and female roles continue to change, our society's views toward women in combat roles will probably change as well. . . none of the expressed concerns nor any of the issues they present is so complex or challenging as to be beyond

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[15]CPT Kelly Fitzpatrick, USA, "Comradeship and Sex Discrimination" (Paper delivered at JSCOPE XII, Washington, DC, 11 January 1990), 13.

> the grasp of capable leadership within the prisoner of war environment.[16]

Courtly love has provided Western society with a model for human relationships for well over 800 years. As our society has become aware of the disparity between traditional female and male roles, we have begun to do away with a number of the conventions associated with the tradition. One of the oldest navies in the Western alliance, the Royal Navy, just recently changed their policies regarding women on combat ships. Before, women were allowed only to serve on those ships designated as "non-combatants." In changing its policy, the British Ministry of Defense said that the distinctions were

> artificial and misleading in the context of modern maritime warfare, when all ships will be liable to serve in potentially dangerous waters.[17]

This is a significant statement from a navy with over 1000 years of history and experience.

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[16]MAJ Wayne E. Dillingham, USAF, "The Possibility of American Military Women Becoming Prisoners of War: Justification for Combat Exclusion Rules?" (Paper delivered at JSCOPE XII, Washington, DC, 11 January 1990), 28.

[17]Thomas Grose, "Royal Navy Opening Most Ships to Women," Navy Times 26 February 1990, 16.

Perhaps now it has come time to do away with the stereotypes to which we have become so accustomed, and, in effect, widen even further the definition of chivalry to include both sexes, rather than just men. There is a prevailing attitude which has seen the beginning of a shift towards equality between men and women, and while the military cannot necessarily change the attitude of the society which supports it, we may begin to feel more of the effects of those people who are trying to correct a disparity. The role of the military leaders, as it has always been, will be to support these changes in the structure of the command, and to obtain the highest standard of operational readiness in their units. The additional challenge will be in the hands of the commanders, whose efforts will bring about the most appreciable results by making the policy of sexual non-discriminatior a priority without ostracizing the women assigned to their command. As the Western value system comes to acknowledge the potential resource of women, the issue of women's and men's roles will cease to be a concern. The strength of the tradition of chivalry and courtly love remains in its resiliency and survivability through hundreds of years. It is, however, still our responsibility to engender in the next generation a concept of mutual human respect, based on a universal

standard of behavior, rather than preconceived, even antiquated models of demeanor, based on sex.

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